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ABSTRACT

The prevailing concern for teacher and student accountability in education and increasing problems with student discipline have led some schools to adopt a single model of classroom discipline. For example, in one district in Florida, Lee Canter's model of assertive discipline, a behavioristic approach to classroom management, was mandated for use throughout the district. The purpose of this paper is, first, to discuss the detrimental effects of requiring teachers to adopt a single model of discipline on teachers' ability to engage in reflective practice and, second, to describe an alternative approach that would foster the development of classroom discipline through reflective practice. (Author)

Detrimental Effects of Mandated Models of Discipline on the Practice of Reflective Teaching

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Abstract

The prevailing concern for teacher and student accountability in education and increasing problems with student discipline have led some schools to adopt a single model of classroom discipline. For example, in one district in Florida Lee Canter's model of assertive discipline, a behavioristic approach to classroom management, was mandated for use throughout the district. The purpose of this paper is, first, to discuss the detrimental effects of requiring teachers to adopt a single model of discipline on teachers' ability to engage in reflective practice and, second, to describe an alternative approach that would foster the development of classroom discipline through reflective practice.

Some schools and school districts have mandated that all teachers use a single discipline strategy to cope with increasing problems of disruptive student behavior in classrooms. For example, in one district in Florida Lee Canter's (1976) model of assertive discipline, a behavioristic approach to classroom management, was mandated for use throughout the district. The reasoning underlying such mandates is that many teachers are unable to control their students' behavior. It is believed that a consistent school-wide policy will provide the structure that many classrooms lack and will help students adjust to classroom life by providing consistent rules and expectations across teachers and grade levels. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the detrimental effects of requiring teachers to adopt a single model of discipline on teachers' ability to engage in reflective practice and to propose an alternative approach to classroom management based on reflective practice.

A Technical Vs. Professional Conception of Teaching

Reflective teaching requires the "rational consideration of appropriate action based on one's beliefs about the purposes of education and the potential and actual consequences of action" (Ross, 1987, p. 2). Imposition of a behavioristic model of discipline on teachers deprives them of the opportunity to think reflectively about classroom management and creates conditions

that reduce the likelihood that teachers will engage in reflective practice.

The technical conception of teaching underlying the mandate of a behavioristic approach to classroom control is incompatible with the professional conception of teaching underlying reflective practice. A technical view of teaching fails to recognize the professional demands of teaching, that is, that teaching requires deliberative decisions about whether and when to apply specific skills (Kennedy, 1987). It requires that teachers treat all observable behavior with the same strategies. In other words, it ignores the intentionality of practice (Kennedy, 1987).

The goals and processes of reflective practice are based on the understanding that "the situations of practice are not problems to be solved but problematic situations characterized by uncertainty, disorder, and indeterminacy" (Schon, 1983, p. 15-16). As such, they cannot be solved by standardized techniques or rules rigidly applied irrespective of the particular context.

> To the extent that an institution seeks to accommodate to the reflection-in-action of its professional members, it must meet several extraordinary conditions. In contrast to the normal bureaucratic emphasis on uniform procedures, objective measures of performance, and center/periphery systems of control, a reflective institution must place a high priority on flexible

> procedures, differentiated responses qualitative appreciation of complex processes, and decentralized responsibility for judgment and action. In contrast to the normal bureaucratic emphasis on technical rationality, a reflective institution must make a place for attention to conflicting values and purposes. (Schon, 1983, p. 338)

Establishing the classroom environment for learning is a political and moral process (Apple, 1979). District mandating of behavioral systems reduces it to a technical problem and obscures the profound ethical implications of imposing a manipulative relationship on teacher and student that teaches students that knowledge is of worth because of its exchange value not for its intrinsic value (Apple, 1979; Everhart, 1983).

Artificial Separation of Classroom Management and Instruction

Teachers' failure to see the intrinsic relationship between classroom management and subject matter is reflected in Fuller and Brown's (1975) research indicating that teachers' concerns during the first stage of professional development focus on survival, then move to students, and finally to subject matter. In the minds of most beginning teachers, concerns about classroom control dominate their thinking. Rarely is a connection made between interesting curriculum activities and classroom management. In fact, many teachers seem only minimally concerned about subject matter. A review of six studies using video stimulated recall found 39-60% of all of the teachers'

considerations involve students, 22-31% instructional process, and 6-14% subject matter (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Bromme (1987) pointed out that "it is quite remarkable that 'subject matter' is so rarely mentioned as a cue that precedes decisions, as the students' learning process is concerned with the content" (p. 127).

Mandating a behavioral model of classroom management perpetuates the separation of subject matter concerns from management concerns. However, the divorce of management from curriculum is not limited to behavioral approaches to motivation. It pervades thinking about teaching. All psychological models of academic motivation (Stipek, 1988) are devoid of consideration of subject matter content. Whether based on a behavioristic or cognitive foundation, motivation theories ignore the role that specific aspects of the subject matter might play in arousing student interest, enthusiasm and commitment to learning. For example, behavioristic theory advocates the use of externally applied and logically unrelated reinforcers to elicit and sustain interest in subject matter. On the basis of behavioristic theory, concrete reinforcers and corrective feedback are employed to control the attention and responses of the learner. Similarly, cognitive theories of motivation emphasize the need to develop the individual's sense of competence or mastery to maintain the learner's involvement in school tasks.

Thus, the psychological theories that form the foundation of teacher education fail to adequately recognize that students

interested in the subject matter create fewer behavior problems than students who are bored and frustrated (Fontana, 1985, p. 175). If districts empowered their teachers to create interesting and appropriate curriculum experiences for their students, problems of classroom control could be significantly reduced.

Obscuring Individuality

Rigid adherence to a behavioral classroom management plan ignores the fact that children's off-task behavior may represent diverse needs, for example off-task behavior may reflect a child's failure to understand the lesson, need for attention, fatigue, or lack of interest (Calderhead, 1987). To react to each of these needs with the same controlling response ignores the underlying need that prompted the off-task behavior.

In describing an inservice education project at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Schon (1983) demonstrated the power of reflective practice to discover new insights into children's learning when teachers "challenged themselves to discover the meanings of a child's puzzling behavior" by searching for the child's reason (p. 68). As Schon pointed out, "Through reflection, [the reflective practitioner] can surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice, and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness" (p. 61). Such insights are less likely when teachers are forced

to treat students' behavior with predetermined consequences despite differences in the purposes underlying those behaviors. Reflection-in-action requires that the practitioner treat each case as unique. Therefore, the reflective practitioner cannot respond by mindlessly applying standardized techniques.

> The teacher, who attributes the student's predicament to his way of framing the problem, tries to make new sense of the problematic situation he is encountering at secondhand. The situation is complex and uncertain, and there is a problem in finding the problem. (Schon, 1983, p. 129)

Emphasis on Control vs. Meaning

A district-mandated classroom management system places inordinate emphasis on order in the classroom. McNeil (1986) has shown that external demands for classroom control lead teachers to "defensive" teaching tactics to minimize the likelihood of student resistance. Teachers reduce content to simplistic fragments, eliminate almost all reading or writing assignments and any controversial material that might evoke discussion or questions from students. As McNeil concluded:

> Much of the student apathy, and even occasional resistance, which administrators see as a motivation problem requiring more discipline procedures arises in these schools precisely because goals of order have already undermined the ability of staff to deal with educative goals. (p. 161)

Carter and Doyle (1987) described similar behavior in the teacher they studied:

> The teacher's decisions in this classroom often appeared to be driven by the logic of classroom management (that is, keeping students engaged in work) rather than by the logic of the content. Assignments appeared to be scheduled on the basis of how work segments fitted into the time frames of class sessions or how topics appealed to students rather than how they were meaningfully connected.
>
> There is an important message here for teacher evaluation. If the criteria for judging teaching place an overriding emphasis on clarity, engagement, and order, it is possible that teachers will avoid ambiguous tasks because of their impact on the classroom efficiency and productivity. Teachers will be forced, in other words, to smooth out the work system in advance, emphasize only skills and guided practice, and avoid tasks that require students to struggle with meaning. In such management-driven classes, it is possible that meaningfulness and higher-level processing of subject matter will be pushed aside. Evaluation must be sensitive to the overall purposes of instruction in a particular class and to the effects of different types of academic work on classroom processes. (pp. 156-157)

Thus, in their efforts to maintain orderly classrooms teachers depend on classroom activities that emphasize getting

the right answer rather than understanding the content (Carter & Doyle, 1987; McNeil, 1987). Evidence from these and other studies (Davis, 1873; Eaton, Anderson, & Smith, 1984; Erlwanger 1975) suggest that students acclimate themselves to work without understanding. They learn to accept considerable arbitrariness in their activities and the work they are expected to complete (Apple, 1979). They follow rules without understanding the rationale underlying the rules. When academic work and understanding are dissociated, learning does not occur. In such situations, Dewey (1933) said, students become intellectually irresponsible. "They do not ask for the meaning of what they learn, in the sense of what difference it makes to the rest of their beliefs and to their actions" (p. 33). It becomes clear why students fail to remember the cultural information on national surveys that teachers insist they have been taught. They have not transformed the information into meaning.

Blaming the Victim

Behavioristic means of control encourage teachers to attribute students' behavior problems to causes internal to students rather than to teachers' instructional strategies, curriculum materials, or institutional and societal conditions. Ryan (1976) documented the blinding logic inherent in the process of Blaming the Victim:

> In pursuing this logic, no one remembers to ask questions about the collapsing buildings and torn textbooks; the frightened, insensitive teachers; the six additional desks

> in the room; the blustering, frightened principals; the relentless segregation; the callous administrator; the irrelevant curriculum; the bigoted or cowardly members of the school board; the insulting history book; the stingy taxpayers; the fairy-tale readers; or the self-serving faculty of the local teachers' college. We are encouraged to confine our attention to the child and to dwell on all his alleged defects. (p. 4).

School systems can avoid questioning their practices as long as they can focus the blame on students for classroom disruptions.

Summary

Mandated models of discipline impede teachers' ability to reflect on their practice. Such models impose a technical model of teaching that denies teachers' responsibility to consider the profound ethical implications of a rigid method of controlling students' behavior. By requiring teachers to use a standardized approach to behavior, these models ignore children's individuality and unique needs. Mandated discipline strategies encourage teachers to manage rather than understand the complexities of the classroom. They perpetuate the tendency to separate management from curriculum concerns. They create an inordinate valuing of classroom order over meaning that contributes to the proliferation of unchallenging, overly simplified instruction. By focusing on the student as the cause of classroom discipline problems, these models discourage

teachers from considering the many instructional and structural factors that may account for students' behavior problems. These models communicate to students that their role is to do as they are told without question, to accept a certain arbitrariness in their lives in schools. They teach students that the value of learning is in what it is able to buy, rather than in what it offers the individual in terms of understanding about oneself and the world one inhabits. Greene (1988) summarized the effect that such approaches have on teachers' and students' ability to reflect on their lives:

> A concern for the critical and the imaginative, for the opening of new ways of "looking at things," is wholly at odds with the technicist and behaviorist emphases we still find in American schools. (p. 126)

She pointed out that these emphases reflect "an absence of concern for the ways in which young people feel conditioned, determined, even fated by prevailing circumstances" (p. 124). Under such conditions, she warned, students come to accept the inequities in their lives "as wholly 'normal'" (p. 125).

A Reflective Approach to Developing Classroom Discipline

Students' performance on national assessment tests, the rising dropout rate, and violence in the schools demonstrate that current approaches to classroom discipline are failing. The implicit messages communicated to students and teachers through mandated behavioristic approaches to discipline reinforce feelings of powerlessness and frustration. Overcoming the

passivity and apathy that paralyze teachers and students requires an approach that liberates human creativity and the desire to know and understand. The discussion that follows describes the conditions needed to unleash students' and teachers' imagination and instill a commitment to learning.

A Professional Climate for Teaching

To cope effectively with the pervasive uncertainties and conflicting goals of teaching, teachers need an environment which enables them to become reflective practitioners. As they wrestle with the unending dilemmas that classroom teaching presents, teachers need opportunities to discuss with peers engaged in similar struggles to clarify the issues involved and discover viable solutions. They need to explore the ethical implications of alternative approaches to dealing with student problems in a nonthreatening context. If the school environment supports and rewards experimentation in solving classroom problems, if teachers' problem-solving ability is respected and encouraged by involving them in democratic decision making to solve school problems, teachers are more likely to experiment with courageous and innovative ideas in their classrooms.

Managing the Classroom through Effective Instruction

Engaging students' minds with compelling subject matter can reduce the need to use extrinsic methods of behavior control. Dewey (1896) understood that effective curriculum is the basis for effective discipline. His distinction between inner and outer attention illustrates this understanding. Outer attention,

keeping students' attention physically on the lesson, is the focus of behavioristic means of control. In contrast, inner attention, refers to students' thought. Inner attention, an essential condition of mental growth, he explained, "is the giving of the mind without reserve or qualification to the subject at hand" (cited in Borrowman, 1965, p. 148). The supreme criterion of effective teaching for Dewey is the ability to capture students' inner attention:

> To recognize the signs of its presence or absence, to know how it is initiated and maintained, how to test it by results attained, and to test <u>apparent</u> results by it. . . It means insight into soul-action. . . [the ability to judge] the kind and mode of subject-matter which the pupil needs at a given moment to keep his attention moving forward effectively and healthfully. . . a sense of what adequate and genuine intellectual activity means (cited in Borrowman, 1965, p. 148)

For Dewey, the secret to classroom control is "the appreciation of the subject matter fit to call out direct mental activity" (Borrowman, 1965, p. 162).

<u>Control through Meaning</u>

Recent research offers insights into the failure of current instructional strategies to capture students' imagination. The emphasis on isolated skills severs the connection between academic work and understanding (Doyle, 1984). Instruction for

understanding requires restructuring of knowledge already present not the mere transmission of discrete bits of information (Bromme, 1987). Students are not empty vessels to be filled or products on an assembly line; they seek meaning and understanding (Everhart, 1983). To engage students in the search for meaning, teachers must struggle to understand students' perspectives and challenge those perspectives through impassioned dialogue. As Dewey (1916) noted, students must grapple with problems to achieve understanding: "Only by wrestling with the conditions of the problem at first hand, seeking and finding his own way out, does [the student] think" (p. 160). Significant discussion demands that teachers develop rich "representational repertoires" of the subjects they teach that will enable them to transform the content "into multiple forms that will develop understanding in students" (Wilson, Shulman, & Richert, 1987, p. 113). Dewey (1933) described the importance of the teachers' understanding of the structure of the subject matter by pointing out that teachers who leave "a permanent intellectual impress" are teachers who

> maintain continuity of thought and effort even when admitting what seemed to be diversions and forays into side fields; . . . who introduce novelty and variety to keep attention alert and taut, but who also utilize these factors to contribute to the building up of the main problem and the enrichment of the main theme. (p. 54)

Valuing and Developing Individuality

The standardized procedures of behavioristic approaches lead teachers to ignore the unique and diverse perspectives represented in the personalities of the students in their classrooms and force students to repress their needs and restrain their desire to take the initiative. A reflective approach to teaching sensitizes teachers to the rich and rewarding differences among students. Greene concluded that to teach reflectively requires that the teacher

> tries to look through students' eyes, to struggle with them as subjects in search of their own projects, their own ways of making sense of the world. . . to interpret from as many vantage points as possible lived experience, the ways there are of being in the world. (p. 120)

In valuing student individuality, teachers provide the climate students need to create authentic and complex selves aware of their possibilities for action and change. As Piaget (1965) pointed out:

> Autonomous and inner discipline can exist in a class only to the extent that the work enlists the major part of the child's spontaneous initiative and activity. (p. 364)

Discovering Reasons rather than Blaming the Victim

A reflective approach to teaching expands the vistas for change. The behaviorist's goal is to control student's behavior. To achieve that aim, the focus of change is narrowly restricted to the student. In contrast, the goal of the reflective practitioner is to liberate the student's intelligence. To

accomplish this goal requires careful observation, sensitive listening, and thoughtful analysis to determine the appropriate focus of change. The reflective practitioner is open to the possibility that the focus for change might be the teacher, the curriculum, the school, the family, or the society, depending on the unique characteristics of the problem.

Conclusion

Behavioristic approaches to classroom management mechanize the classroom; a reflective approach humanizes the classroom. It supports and encourages the development of the unique capacities of human intelligence--to search for meaning, to transform the environment, and create the self. By struggling to understand the students' reasons rather than controlling them, the reflective practitioner establishes a caring rather than manipulative relationship with students. In an environment of caring, teachers and students can release their imagination to explore their uncertainties and discover new insights and understandings.

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